

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-AWASHINGTON TIMES
2 December 1985

FILE ONLY

Israel offers an apology in spy affair

By Andrew Meisels
SPECIAL TO THE WASHINGTON TIMES

JERUSALEM — The government of Israel apologized publicly yesterday for any espionage activity that might have been carried out in the United States by one of its intelligence-gathering units.

Such activity, Israel promised, if confirmed, would not be repeated in the future, and the unit responsible for it would be disbanded.

"Spying on the U.S. stands in total contradiction to our policy," Prime Minister Shimon Peres told the Cabinet in a report later read to reporters. "Such activity, to the extent it did take place, was wrong and the government of Israel apologizes."

The Washington Times was told that the unit in question was charged with gathering information to aid in the war against terrorism. The unit was said to have operated independently of Israel's intelligence community and the country's political leadership.

"Nobody knew about it at the Cabinet level," a Israeli official told United Press International.

In its unprecedented public apology, however, Israel emphasized that all the facts in the case were not yet in, and that final conclusions on who was responsible had not yet been drawn.

The apology was drafted after intensive contacts between Israeli and U.S. administration leaders, in an attempt to lower the tensions between the two countries following the arrest of Jonathan Jay Pollard.

Israeli officials said that U.S. administration leaders were also interested in preventing a confrontation between the two allies.

In addition to the public apology, Israel has undertaken privately to return all classified U.S. documents and to turn over information that

could help the American investigation. Israel will agree to allow its Washington-based diplomats to "talk with" FBI investigators, although it will not allow its diplomats to be sub-

jected to a full-dress investigation. As with all foreign diplomats, the Israelis enjoy immunity from such investigations.

The two Israeli diplomats who returned here following the arrest of Mr. Pollard will also be "interviewed" by American investigators, The Washington Times was told. The two are Ilan Ravid, who served as deputy science attache at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and Yossi Yagur, consul for science at the Israeli Consulate in New York.

The text of Israel's apology was put into its final form by Israel's prime minister, foreign minister and defense minister, in consultation with heads of the country's intelligence services.

Yossi Beilan, cabinet secretary, read the statement. He declared, "The government of Israel is determined to spare no effort in investigating this case thoroughly and comprehensively and in uncovering all the facts to the last detail, no matter where the investigation may lead."

Mr. Beilan continued: "The government of Israel promises the government of the United States that in the wake of the inquiry — to the extent that the allegations are confirmed — conclusions will be drawn regarding those responsible, and the unit involved in this activity will be completely and permanently dismantled, and the necessary organizational steps will be taken to ensure that such activities are not repeated."

"Our relations with the United States are based on a firm foundation of deep friendship, close affinity and mutual trust. Spying on the U.S. stands in total contradiction to our policy.

"An activity of this kind — to the

extent that it did take place — was wrong, and the government of Israel apologizes for it," Mr. Beilan said.

The statement was handed over to U.S. Ambassador to Israel Thomas Pickering for transmission to Washington several hours before being made public here.

With this apology, The Washington Times was told, Israel feels it has fulfilled three demands made on it by Washington.

The demands were: That Israel apologize publicly; that Israel promise such an incident would not be repeated; that Israel admit the existence of a unit which was responsible for intelligence work in the United States.

In Houston, Secretary of State George P. Shultz said the United States welcomed Israel's apology and said Israel had assured Washington it would cooperate in determining the extent and manner of the operation allegedly involving Mr. Pollard, a civilian intelligence analyst working for the U.S. Navy.

"This is an excellent statement," Mr. Shultz said of yesterday's Israeli statement. "We are satisfied by it and wholeheartedly welcome it."

Mr. Shultz was on a stopover on his way to the Caribbean before visiting Colombia.

"We have been assured that they will provide us with access to the individuals who are knowledgeable about the case and that Israel will give us a full report on the extent of whatever activities their investigation reveals to have taken place," he said.

He said the FBI would now be able to talk to two diplomats withdrawn by Israel, but that he had no information on where or when that might occur.

Mr. Shultz declined to comment on whether Israel would return the hundreds of documents Mr. Pollard is alleged to have given it.

Mr. Shultz said he had been assured by Prime Minister Peres and other Cabinet officials that they had no knowledge of the spying operation until Mr. Pollard was arrested outside the Israeli embassy in Washington.

According to Western sources, Israeli Defense Ministry Director Menachem Meron and Foreign Ministry Deputy Director Hanan Bar-On are flying to Washington for talks expected to focus on the Pollard case.

Mr. Pollard, arrested 10 days ago while apparently seeking asylum at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, was accused in a court hearing last week of passing documents to Israel on weaponry and the intelligence-gathering systems of foreign countries.